

Incorporating disability in an urban walk accessibility tool assessment

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TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Public health officials, Health promotion officials, Disability recreation and exercise program coordinators, Urban planners, Neighborhood advocates, Disability rights advocates, Public Health Students

ABSTRACT: Background: People living with disabilities are less likely to engage in exercise due to diverse environmental barriers. Public health research has identified links between the built environment and physical activity. However, the needs of people with disabilities are usually underrepresented in the design of the built environment, and existing tools for assessing the built environment do not specifically incorporate mobility, hearing, and visual impairments in their assessment. This project's objective was to create a measurement tool for rating walkway accessibility in an urban setting from a disability perspective.

Method: We created a ten-item environmental assessment tool -- based on existing CDC tools -- to evaluate conditions that facilitate or impede walkability/rollability for people with disabilities (e.g., sidewalks, curb cuts, noise, potholes). Five walkways in the Lloyd District in Portland, Oregon, were evaluated.

Results: Our assessment tool showed that the five walkways have an average index of 2.25 (0.24) on a 1-5 scale, with high scores indicating poor walkability/rollability. Differences between walkways were observed on the noise, detectable warning pavement, slope accommodation, and curb cut items.

Conclusion: This environmental assessment tool provides a better understanding of the barriers people with disabilities may face in navigating Portland's urban setting.

OBJECTIVE(S): Describe how barriers in the urban built-environment constitute a significant risk factor to the development of healthy lifestyle among people with disabilities.

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